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China Type 055 destroyer Xianyang makes first-ever South Pacific deployment to Vanuatu.

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According to information published by Ryan Chan on October 21, 2024, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy's Type 055 destroyer Xianyang arrived at Port Vila, Vanuatu, marking the first known deployment of this advanced warship class to the South Pacific.
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Chinese PLA Navy's Type 055 destroyer Xianyang. (Picture source: Chinese TV)

The Xianyang, with hull number 108, is one of China's most powerful surface combatants, designed for multi-mission roles, including air defense, anti-submarine warfare, and striking land targets. This deployment signals China's expanding naval presence in the Pacific region, highlighting its ability to project power beyond its traditional areas of influence, particularly amid ongoing tensions in the Asia-Pacific waters.

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Equipped with sophisticated radar and missile systems, these Type 055 destroyers offer robust area air defense, making them vital assets in both independent operations and as escorts for China's aircraft carriers. This deployment could be seen as part of China's broader strategy to secure its maritime interests and strengthen ties with Pacific Island nations like Vanuatu.

China-Vanuatu relations

Vanuatu's relationship with China has deepened significantly since diplomatic ties were established in 1982. This relationship is marked by strong economic cooperation, infrastructural development, and diplomatic alignment. China has become a key partner in Vanuatu's development, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Vanuatu consistently supports China's "One-China" policy and has benefited from Chinese investment in various sectors.

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While Vanuatu's cooperation with China has been positive in many aspects, it has also raised concerns, particularly from Western nations like Australia, which worry about China's growing influence in the South Pacific. Speculation about a potential Chinese military presence in Vanuatu has circulated, although both Vanuatu and China have denied such claims.

Chinese CCP strategy

China's strategy in the Pacific Islands is driven by a combination of geopolitical, economic, and military interests, focusing on gaining influence and leveraging key opportunities in this strategically important region. The Pacific Islands, though small in population, are geographically crucial, offering China potential access routes and political sway over critical sea lanes.

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A central part of China's approach involves economic and development aid through infrastructure projects and investments, which are often linked to its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Countries like the Solomon Islands and Kiribati have benefited from Chinese funding.

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